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STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS

Note by the Administrator

Summary

This note presents the Administrator's understanding of the Governing Council's wishes for the functioning and administrative arrangements for the Standing Committee for Programme Matters. This understanding is based on decision 90/23, earlier decisions relating to precursor bodies, and on informal consultations held with the Members of the Council and the Programme on 2 and 5 November 1990.

For those issues on which a consensus seemed to exist, the Governing Council's formal confirmation is sought.

Two issues require further consideration by the Council:

(a) How will participation of representatives of each low-income member country of the Council at intersessional meetings of the Standing Committee be facilitated? The maximum cost of attendance by all low-income countries is currently estimated at $250,000 for two such meetings;

(b) What arrangements will govern field visits by members of the Standing Committee? In particular, how will the cost - estimated at a maximum of $80,000 per year - be financed?

Discussion on these issues is invited with a view to their resolution so that the Standing Committee for Programme Matters may begin to function with effect from February 1991.

READEX FICHE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Governing Council, by its decision 90/23 of 23 June 1990, decided to merge the Committee of the Whole and its Working Group into a Standing Committee for Programme Matters with the same mandate as in its decisions 83/5 of 24 June 1983 and 85/17 of 29 June 1985 and further decided to review the mechanism in 1997.

2. Decision 90/23 did not cover all aspects of the functioning and administrative arrangements for the Standing Committee. As a first step towards filling lacunae and clarifying issues, the Administrator convened informal consultative meetings with the Members of the Programme. These took place on 2 and 5 November 1990 in New York.

3. To facilitate the consultations, the Administrator prepared and circulated a working paper drawing attention to the issues requiring clarification or decisions in connection with the Standing Committee. These issues related to scope, mandate, membership, agenda, reporting procedures, Bureau, rules of procedure, decisions, records, timing of sessions, financing of participants and field visits.

4. From the informal consultations, a consensus seemed to emerge on most of the issues raised, with the notable exception of field visits. The present note records the Administrator's understanding of the Governing Council's wishes on the issues raised during the informal consultations and seeks the Council's formal endorsement of them. The note also puts forward proposals on unresolved issues for the Council's consideration.

I. SCOPE

5. According to paragraph 1 of decision 90/23, the Standing Committee takes its mandate from previous decisions 83/5 and 85/17, which relate strictly to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, decision 87/20 of 20 June 1987 extended the scope of the Committee of the Whole to consideration of programming matters relating to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), provided that the latter are not considered simultaneously with UNDP issues. It was the clear sense of the Governing Council in its informal consultations that UNFPA programme matters should also be taken up by the Standing Committee.

II. MEMBERSHIP

6. Deriving from arrangements applied to its precursors, specifically and most recently modified in paragraph 2 of decision 89/25 of 30 June 1989, and in keeping with the sense of the Governing Council during informal consultations, membership of the Standing Committee will be composed of all members of the Governing Council and participation will be open to all members of the Programme.

III. MANDATE

7. The mandate of the Standing Committee, taken over from the Committee of the Whole, is:

(a) To consider major issues related to programme matters;

(b) To review country, regional, interregional and global programmes and projects;

(c) To review programme and project implementation;

(d) To consider reports on evaluation studies; and

(e) To deal with other matters relating to UNDP programme management.

8. This mandate will also cover UNFPA programme matters.

IV. AGENDA

9. The Governing Council will refer to the Standing Committee those items relating to programme matters. In so doing, the Council will bear in mind that it, i.e., the Governing Council, is the sole decision-making body of UNDP.

10. The Governing Council may determine the Standing Committee agenda at its organizational meeting, when it approves its programme of work and the agenda for its regular session. At the opening of the regular sessions, the Council may also allocate additional items for consideration. The Standing Committee may recommend to the Council subjects for consideration by the Committee at future sessions.

11. The Standing Committee will, in the meeting which convenes during the regular session of the Governing Council, set aside at least two days to discuss programme matters related to UNFPA.

V. BUREAU

12. The President of the Governing Council, or another member of the Bureau designated by him, shall preside over the Standing Committee or the Council may designate one of its Vice-Presidents as Chairman of the Standing Committee. In this latter case, an equitable geographical rotation system is to be foreseen for the Presidency of the Governing Council and the Chairmanships of the Standing Committee, the Budgetary and Finance Committee and the Drafting Group.

VI. RULES OF PROCEDURE

13. The Standing Committee will work within the framework of the procedures of the Governing Council, in the same manner as the Budget and Finance Committee.

VII. REPORTING AND DECISIONS

14. The Standing Committee will prepare draft decisions, which will be transmitted in its report, for adoption by the Governing Council at its plenary meeting. The reports submitted by the Standing Committee will state its recommendations, including draft decisions for adoption by the Council. An oral report may supplement a simple transmittal of the recommendations of the Standing Committee.

VIII. RECORDS

15. Summary records will not be required of Standing Committee meetings.

IX. TIMING

16. The Standing Committee will meet twice a year, during the regular and organizational sessions of the Governing Council, as far as possible not to coincide with plenary meetings. Other meetings may be held intersessionally.

17. In line with decision 87/20, relating to a precursor body, the Working Group of the Committee of the Whole, it is proposed that intersessional meetings of the Standing Committee be limited to two per year, each for a maximum of one week (see para. 4 of decision 87/20), making a total of four Standing Committee meetings per year. In line with the same decision (para. 6), it is proposed that the Administrator be authorized to facilitate the participation in intersessional meetings of officials responsible for technical co-operation activities from each low-income member country of the Governing Council. The annual cost is currently estimated at $250,000, assuming all low-income countries avail themselves of such funding (i.e., 25 participants twice a year). This maximum cost could be substantially reduced if all eligible countries did not seek assistance and if only one intersessional meeting were held. Paragraph 6 of decision 87/20 also refers to the use of extrabudgetary resources, to the extent available, for the purpose.

18. The timing of Standing Committee meetings will normally be decided at the organizational meeting of the Governing Council in February. Should the Standing Committee need to meet more than four times in any year, a Council decision will be required.

X. FIELD VISITS

19. Paragraph 3 of decision 90/23 states that the Standing Committee, in consultation with host Governments, will organize regular field visits for its members to look into and report back to the Committee on specific aspects of the UNDP field programme. Paragraph 5 of the same decision authorizes the Administrator to facilitate participation of Committee members of the Council in the field visits.

20. The informal consultations in November 1990 confirmed that the UNFPA field programme should also be covered by the field visits.

21. No clear position emerged on the timing and frequency of the visits, on the selection of countries to be visited, on the composition of the groups, on the specific programme aspects to be studied, nor on the ways in which the Administrator might facilitate participation in the field visits.

22. The following proposals are offered for the consideration of the Governing Council; they take into account observations made during the informal consultations.

Timing and frequency of visits

23. Field visits should be limited to a maximum of two per year. The duration of each visit should not normally exceed 10 days, including travel time, although travel exigencies to some countries may require a slight extension of the 10-day limit. Each 10-day visit should not attempt to cover more than two countries. Visits to different regions may be combined, with possible savings in travel costs, subject to the overall limit of two visits per year.

24. Field visits should be timed and arranged to place the minimum burden on the host Government and the United Nations officials in the country concerned. Care should be taken to avoid overlap with similar missions such as those relating to the Joint Consultative Group on Policy.

25. The participation of field-visit members as observers in mid-term reviews of country programmes and project tripartite reviews should be encouraged.

Selection of regions/countries for field visits

26. The country or countries to be visited will be determined principally by the particular focus of the field visit, e.g., sector, modality, co-ordination, procedure. Normally, no country should be visited more than once in a five-year period.

Composition of the group

27. Field visits will be open to all members of the Standing Committee. The composition of the groups should, therefore, rotate, in order to enable each member of the Governing Council to participate in one field visit during its term of membership (three years). It is thus proposed that each year 16 members - i.e., one third of the 48 members - should participate in these field visits in two groups, of eight each, to visit two regions. Each member country should participate during its second year of membership.

Programme aspects to be studied

28. Field visits are intended to provide information to the Standing Committee based on first-hand exposure to UNDP and UNFPA field programmes. Each year, at its February meeting, the Standing Committee should decide what thematic aspects of programmes it wishes to study in the field and determine the number of field visits required for the purpose (subject to the agreed limit) as well as draw up a short list of countries to be visited, subject to the agreement of the host Governments.

Facilitation of participation in field visits

29. The Governing Council will need to consider whether or not field visits are part of the governance of UNDP and UNFPA. If it concludes positively, then in order to ensure regular visits and a balanced composition of the groups, the costs involved should be provided for in the administrative budgets of UNDP and UNFPA under a separate, identifiable heading. Assuming two visits per year with an average duration of 10 days and with the participation of eight people, the annual cost is estimated at $80,000 ($3,000 average air fare and $200 average per diem).